

Unshakeable: Pivotal Circumstances

Small Group Discussion

Opening question (try to get everyone involved in discussion):

- Looking back at your faith journey, what is one season or event that you would call a defining moment? How did it affect your relationship with God?

Introduction

- Review: We are concluding a sermon series called “Unshakeable.” We’re examining how we can have the kind of growing faith in God that enables us to weather storms with steadfastness. We described this kind of faith as “confidence in God—confidence that God is personal, that he is good, that he cares about you, and that you can trust his promises.”
- Andy Stanley talks about “five faith catalysts,” or experiences that God typically uses to grow people’s confidence in him.* The catalyst that we’re discussing this week is Pivotal Circumstances.

Discuss

- On Sunday, we heard that Pivotal Circumstances are events that are largely outside of our control but that play a major role in shaping our faith in God. Pastor Josh said, **“Sometimes Jesus allows and (sometimes) even creates painful circumstances in our lives, in order to grow our faith in him.”**
 - Just to gauge where everyone is with respect to this principle, (leaders) ask the following: how do you initially respond to that statement? Do you agree, because you can see it in your own life? Do you resist this idea? Is the idea of God using human pain for his glory disturbing to you? Is this a new concept for you? ^[L]_[SEP]
 - In general, how might a set of circumstances beyond our control serve to grow our relationship with God? For example, how could it affect the way that we pray?
 - In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis writes: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” In your opinion, why is it so easy to factor God out of our lives when things are good, and so difficult to factor him out when things aren’t? Why does God almost always become part of the conversation when bad things happen? ^[L]_[SEP]
- Read John 11:1-6. How does it make you feel when you read that Jesus *loved* Lazarus but didn’t go to him in his time of need? ^[L]_[SEP]
- Read John 11:11-15. According to these verses, what is the relationship between Lazarus’ death and the disciples’ faith? ^[L]_[SEP]
- Read John 11:21-27. Listen carefully for, or even circle in your Bible, the terms *believe*, *believing*, and *believes*.
 - What did Martha already believe about Jesus? What did Jesus ask her to believe? What is the difference? ^[L]_[SEP]

*This sermon series has been based on the “Five Faith Catalysts” in *Deep and Wide*, by Andy Stanley. Portions of this study guide have also been adapted from small group materials published by North Point Ministries.

- What difference does it make if an individual really believes that Jesus *is* the resurrection and the life rather than simply one for whom God does an occasional favor (see verse 22)?
- Read John 11:38-45. As Jesus prays (verse 41-42), he cites the reason for pausing to pray before performing the miracle. What is that reason?
 - What is the relationship between the newfound faith of the bystanders and the tragedy that befell Lazarus and his family?
 - Do you think it would have been possible to catalyze that kind of belief any other way?
- Read the following statement by Andy Stanley, and then ask people to respond to it: “When it feels like God is allowing something to happen *to* us, it is easy to lose faith. But when we accept that he is doing something *in* us, we are candidates for the grace we need to endure.”
- **Bringing it home:** Pastor Josh claimed that the deciding factor in whether pivotal circumstances make or break our faith is how we respond when they happen. He suggested three crucial factors that help us to respond in healthy ways. Discuss those factors, which are printed below:
 - **Relationships.** How do loving, godly relationships help us to endure trials and even have a growing faith in the midst of them? How does the absence of such relationships put our faith in God at risk?
 - **Receive, not revolt.**
 - What tends to be your initial reaction when difficult circumstances materialize? Do you tend to cling to God, lash out at him, or run from him?
 - Read James 1:2-4. According to James, what is our role in the midst of the tough circumstances (v. 4)? How can we let perseverance have its full effect?
 - Is there a current area in your life where you are struggling to see God?
 - **Read them (the circumstances) through the right lenses, i.e, gospel lenses.**
 - Read Romans 5:3-8. What role does the gospel (vv. 6-8) play in the process described in vv. 3-5?
 - How does the gospel, as described here, impact the way that we respond to trials?
- **Series Wrap-up:** How do you think that our study of the five faith catalysts will affect your relationship with God? Is there anything particular that you are taking away from this series?

Sharing and prayer:

- Share about any needs that you have, and pray for one another.
- *If anyone in your group is in the midst of potentially pivotal circumstances, pray for them, that God would enable them to see him in the midst of this season.*